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Written statement* submitted by the Khiam Rehabilitation Center for Victims of Torture, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[26 May 2015]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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Bahrain: Human rights defenders at risk in jail, others facing long prison sentences

Most of Bahrain's prominent human rights defenders remain in prison, facing prison or in exile, as the regime attempts to silence criticism and punish all those who cooperate with international NGOs and the United Nations. On 4 May, **Nabeel Rajab,**President of the Bahrain Center for Human Rights (BCHR) and Co-Founder of the Gulf Centre for Human Rights (GCHR), was brought to court to face numerous charges being mounted against him for tweets about human rights issues. The verdict was postponed to 14 May, and he remains in detention in solitary confinement. Rajab, who was arrested on 2 April, is facing up to ten years in prison on one charge alone, in addition to a six-month sentence handed down on 20 January 2015 for allegedly "insulting public institutions and the army".

Rajab was charged with allegedly "disseminating false news in time of war, which may undermine preparations and war operations, and openly discrediting a statutory entity," in connection with tweets regarding the war against Yemen. It is alleged that Rajab re-tweeted photos that originate from Palestinian and Syrian conflicts and made comments detrimental to Bahrain's military operations in Yemen. Although Rajab removed the photos, the authorities used them as an opportunity to imprison him on fabricated charges. His lawyer **Jalila Al-Sayed** had been prevented from seeing his case file.

On 4 April, Rajab was presented to the Public Prosecution and charged for breaching Article 133 of the penal code, which states: "A punishment of imprisonment for a period not exceeding 10 years shall be inflicted upon any person who deliberately announces in wartime false or malicious news, statements or rumours or mounts adverse publicity campaigns, so as to cause damage to military preparations for defending the State of Bahrain or military operations of the Armed Forces, to cause people to panic or to weaken the nation's perseverance."

In a separate case, Rajab was also charged under another article of the penal code over tweets and retweets about the violence that took place in Jaw Prison on 10 March 2015, where prisoners were violently attacked after they protested against their bad conditions, and subjected to collective punishment. Article 216 states: "A person shall be liable for imprisonment or payment of a fine if he offends/ denigrates by any method of publication the National Assembly, or other constitutional institutions, the army, law courts, authorities or government agencies."

Some prisoners from Jaw Prison were not been able to contact their families for weeks after the incident on 10 March. Prisoners reported to have been badly injured include human rights defender **Naji Fateel** of the Bahrain Youth Society for Human Rights, who was jailed for 15 years for his human rights activities in 2013 after he returned from speaking at the UN Human Rights Council.

According to Fateel's family, he was badly hurt during the events of 10 March, even though he was a bystander. Fateel's wife was denied visits to him for weeks, but other prisoners reported to their families that they saw his clothes covered in blood, and that Fateel suffered a broken leg and nose, among other injuries. The most recent reports from April are that Fateel was among prisoners being subjected to "physical and psychological torture."

Jailed human rights defenders have resorted to hunger strikes to protest the inhumane conditions, including **Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja** and **Dr. Abduljalil Al-Singace**, who are part of the group of activists and human rights defenders known as the Bahrain 13. Both men were sentenced to life in prison for their roles in peaceful protests in 2011. This group of men have been prevented from receiving proper medical care.

They have also been subjected to humiliating and degrading full-body searches. In March, Al-Khawaja refused to have visits in an act of protest against this degrading treatment. They're also harassed during phone calls, which are cut off suddenly and appear to be tapped.

On 27 April, Dr. Al-Singace called his family and reportedly sounded weak and said that his white blood cell count is still low. He has been in Al-Qala'a hospital since 1 April due to the deterioration of his health since he began his hunger strike on 21 March 2015. Al-Singace suffers from lower back and neck disc problems. His recent medical tests showed that he has urinary tract infection and enlarged prostate.

Human rights defender **Hussain Jawad Parweez**, President of the European-Bahraini Organisation for Human Rights (EBOHR), remains in Dry Dock Detention Centre awaiting trial on 12 May. He was allegedly tortured and threatened after being detained in the notorious Criminal Investigations Directorate (CID) following his arrest on 16 February 2015. He was taken to court on 22 April on charges of raising funds abroad for "subversive groups" to cause damage. Jawad was also in court on 25 February on charges of allegedly insulting the King of Bahrain and "inciting hatred against the regime" following a speech he gave in Manama about human rights.

Meanwhile, two women human rights defenders are facing ongoing trials in violation of their right to free expression. They have both served time in prison in the past year and could be imprisoned again.

Activist **Zainab Al-Khawaja** was in court on 15 April on trumped up charges of entering a restricted area, related to her attempts to visit her father last August, just one of her many cases. That case was postponed to 2June 2015. On 4 December 2014, she was sentenced to three years in prison and a fine of 3000 BHD (approx. USD$7960) on the charge of ripping a picture of the Bahrain monarch during a court hearing in October 2014. The appeal for that charge is on 15 June 2015. Then on 9 December 2014, Al-Khawaja had three hearings when she was sentenced to one year in prison for allegedly "insulting a public officer." A four-month sentence for "destroying public property" was upheld. None of these sentences allow bail, which means that she could be arrested at any time now.

In the meantime, Al-Khawaja's baby is being denied a birth certificate so there is no official paperwork to confirm his existence, and her own passport has also not been renewed, as a form of harassment.

Women's rights defender Ghada Jamsheer faces a travel ban and continuous judicial harassment, in 12 cases related to allegations of corruption at King Hamad hospital she made on twitter, which led to her imprisonment on defamation charges for three months in 2014. On 14 April, she appeared in the Third Lower Criminal Court, and the case was postponed to 9 June.

On 14 March 2015, Jamsheer was informed by the security office at Bahrain International Airport that a travel ban has been imposed by order of the Office of the General Prosecutor. She was on her way to get medical treatment in France. She was accused of allegedly assaulting two police women, one an officer, in September 2014 during her detention. She had no prior knowledge of this particular charge until she was stopped at the airport. On 4 May 2015, she was sentenced to one year in prison (suspended for three years) by the High Criminal Court in this case. Her case is similar to that of **Maryam Al-Khawaja**, GCHR Co-Director, who was falsely accused of assaulting a police woman during her arrest in August 2014, when she arrived in Bahrain to visit her father. She was sentenced in absentia to a year in prison in December 2014.

Khiam Center expresses its concern about the ongoing judicial harassment of human rights defenders in Bahrain and calls on the authorities to:

- Release Nabeel Rajab from pre-trial detention, and drop the charges related to his freedom of expression, freeing him from solitary confinement;
- Investigate allegations of poor conditions in Jaw prison, and the torture of inmates;
- Move inmates back to their original buildings and end the practise of keeping them outside in tents;

- Provide information on health and wellbeing of Naji Fateel, and provide him with the medical attention he requires;

- End the judicial harassment of Zainab Al-Khawaja; provide a birth certificate to her son and renew her passport;

- Lift the travel ban imposed on Ghada Jamsheer and end the judicial harassment against her

- Release all human rights defenders immediately including and ensure their protection from any harassment, torture, and persecution in relation to their peaceful human rights activities.